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OPERATIONAL ACTIVITIES OF THE UNITED NATIONS FOR INTERNATIONAL DEVELOPMENT COOPERATION: FOLLOW-UP TO POLICY RECOMMENDATIONS OF THE GENERAL ASSEMBLY

Policy issues arising from the reports of the Executive Boards of United Nations funds and programmes

Note by the Secretary-General

Background

1. The guidance function of the Economic and Social Council vis-à-vis the Executive Boards of the United Nations funds and programmes was most recently established in General Assembly resolutions 48/162 and 50/227. In these resolutions, the Assembly provided, inter alia, that the Council would review and evaluate reports of the funds and programmes with a view to enhancing the operational activities of the United Nations system on a system-wide basis (para. 16 (c) of annex I to Assembly resolution 48/162). Subsequently, in paragraph 60 of annex I to its resolution 50/227, the Assembly indicated that this function of the Council should be reinforced by giving attention to objectives, priorities and strategies in the implementation of the policies formulated by the Assembly, as well as concentrating on cross-cutting and coordination issues related to operational activities, including through a high-level meeting, in order to provide an opportunity for policy makers to engage in discussion on the broader issues for development cooperation. To facilitate this task of the Council, and to avoid repetition of discussions, the governing boards should be requested to highlight in their respective reports to the Council the issues requiring examination and identify action to be taken (para. 62 of annex I to Assembly resolution 50/227). Moreover, in its resolution 1995/51, the Council requested the Executive Boards, in their reports to the Council, to identify specific problems, opportunities and areas

in which the Council could provide cross-sectoral coordination and overall guidance on a system-wide basis, and to make appropriate proposals, which should be further analysed as a basis for recommendations to the Council, to ensure that the policies formulated by the Assembly, particularly during the triennial policy review of operational activities, were appropriately implemented on a system-wide basis. The Agenda for Development also calls for the Council to provide guidance to Executive Boards of funds and programmes and monitor the implementation of Assembly policies and guidelines, including operational aspects of the follow-up of major United Nations conferences (see document A/AC.250/1 (Part III), para. 252 (c)). The Agenda further calls upon the Council to promote greater coherence and closer interaction between the work of its subsidiary bodies and the work of the United Nations funds and programmes (ibid.).

Issues

2. The substantive session of 1997 of the Economic and Social Council has before it the reports of the Executive Boards of the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP)/United Nations Population Fund (UNFPA), the United Nations Children's Fund (UNICEF) and the World Food Programme (WFP). Moreover, the annual reports of executive heads of the United Nations funds and programmes review the implementation of General Assembly resolutions 47/199 and 50/120 and Council resolutions 1996/42 and 1996/43 and deal with issues relating to humanitarian assistance and the follow-up to United Nations conferences, matters being considered by the Council under separate items. While providing complete information on decisions taken by the Boards, these reports do not consider it necessary to refer any policy issue to the General Assembly and the Council for decision and guidance. Similarly, in 1996 the Council had not been seized by the Boards of issues requiring its attention.

3. To assist the Economic and Social Council in considering items emanating from the Boards, an initiative was taken by the Secretariat last year to provide a synoptic overview of the reports of the Boards. In the light of experience, a different type of note is being provided this year, in the hope that it will assist the Council in its role of providing guidance to the Boards.

4. The present note highlights items that may be of interest to the Economic and Social Council under its operational activities of the United Nations for international development cooperation segment, it being understood that the Council will have before it other reports emanating from the funds and programmes and the specialized agencies for items under its general segment. The note identifies issues that have system-wide implications and a relationship to the implementation of General Assembly resolution 50/120 and previous resolutions of the Assembly or of the Council on this subject.

5. An overview of the decisions by the Boards reveals that an important number of country programmes, or similar instruments, were approved over this past year (see annex I). There is, however, no indication that these programmes were reviewed in the context of the country strategy note (CSN), where available. The Economic and Social Council may recall that, in

establishing the CSN, the General Assembly had foreseen that it should be transmitted to the governing body of each funding organization as a reference for the consideration of its specific country programme (Assembly resolution 47/199, para. 9 (c)). Moreover, it may be useful for the Council to receive information from the Boards on follow-up to United Nations conferences through country and regional programmes.

6. The Economic and Social Council may wish to recommend that the Boards give their views on the implementation of this provision concerning the CSN. This may be relevant in the context of the upcoming triennial policy review of operational activities when the subject of the CSN as a frame of reference for country programmes will be considered. The Council may also wish to consider giving guidance to ensure that the CSN, where it exists, is the common framework for country programmes of United Nations system organizations (General Assembly resolution 50/120, para. 18).

7. The subject of the follow-up to United Nations conferences was considered in 1997 by the Executive Boards of UNDP/UNFPA and UNICEF. In its decision 97/14, the Executive Board of UNDP/UNFPA invited the President of the Executive Board to submit to the General Assembly at its fifty-second session, through the current session of the Economic and Social Council, the proposal for an overall review and appraisal of the implementation of the Programme of Action of the International Conference on Population and Development, 1/ for the consideration of the Assembly and subsequent decision on the process and modalities.

8. Subsequently, the President of the UNDP/UNFPA Executive Board wrote to the President of the Economic and Social Council bringing this matter to his attention.

9. The Executive Board of UNICEF in its decision 1997/20 on follow-up to the World Summit for Children requested the Executive Director to support the Secretary-General in the implementation of General Assembly resolution 51/186 of 16 December 1996 and to take necessary action, as part of the country programme process, to advocate for and support efforts to achieve the Summit goals within the framework of national and subnational programmes of action.

10. The Economic and Social Council will also consider this subject, under agenda item 5 entitled "Integrated and coordinated implementation and follow-up of the major international United Nations conferences and summits", at its general segment, in particular the implementation of its resolution 1996/36.

11. In addition, the Economic and Social Council may wish to request information from the Boards on how they are supporting the follow-up to United Nations global conferences, including by establishing agreed programme priorities and corresponding resource allocation priorities.

12. This past year, the Boards considered management reform issues. In this context, the relevant decisions of the UNDP/UNFPA and UNICEF Executive Boards took General Assembly resolution 50/120 as a frame of reference. The Economic

and Social Council may wish to note the important relationship of these reform decisions to wider reform of operational activities for development. Moreover, the attention of the Council is drawn to the relationship of the management reform decisions taken by the Boards to the strengthening of the resident coordinator system, programming modalities, decentralization, and monitoring and evaluation, as well as resource mobilization.

13. It may be recalled that the General Assembly, in its resolution 50/227, annex I, paragraph 12, called on the Boards to adopt a specific and realistic target for core resources, based on the needs arising from their agreed programmes and priorities, as well as the specific mandates of each programme and fund. The Economic and Social Council was asked to consider, on an annual basis in the operational activities segment, the overall financial picture of the funds and programmes, including the availability of resources and the priorities and programmes agreed upon, and make recommendations thereon to the Assembly and the funds and programmes.

14. In discharging this responsibility, the Economic and Social Council has before it, in addition to the above-mentioned reports (which, particularly in the case of UNDP and UNICEF, deal specifically with resource questions: see decision 96/44 of the Executive Board of UNDP/UNFPA 2/ and decisions 1996/34 3/ and 1997/18 of the Executive Board of UNICEF), the annual reports of the relevant heads. Moreover, the report of the Secretary-General on the implementation of General Assembly resolution 50/120 (E/1997/65) contains recommendations on core resources; addendum 1 to that report (E/1997/65/Add.1) analyses recent resource trends in core and non-core resources, and addendum 4 (E/1997/65/Add.4) contains information on contributions for, and expenditures on, operational activities of the United Nations system from 1991 to 1995.

15. Together, this information confirms that, while non-core and other resources have increased, core resources are either stagnant or declining. This poses a major challenge to the Economic and Social Council and it may wish, therefore, to make appropriate recommendations to the General Assembly and to the Boards. The Council may wish to identify, as called for in Assembly resolution 50/227, those issues in resources on funding that it deems to be germane within the context of the upcoming triennial policy review of 1998.

16. On another subject, the Economic and Social Council may wish to note that the Boards have recognized the efforts to harmonize the budget presentations of UNDP, UNICEF and UNFPA. The biennial budget of WFP for the period 1998-1999 will be presented for consideration at the annual session of its Executive Board in October 1997. The presentation of the WFP budget document will closely adhere to the harmonized format adopted by UNDP, UNFPA and UNICEF following deliberations to achieve agreement on a common presentation format, a common set of terms and definitions, and a common preparation methodology vis-à-vis their respective biennial support budgets. Thus, the biennial support budgets for 1998-1999 will be prepared according to the harmonized format for submission to the Executive Boards by the end of 1997.

17. To further assist the Economic and Social Council, an overview of the principal items considered by the Boards in September of 1996 and 1997 is provided in annex II. Moreover, a list of countries for which country programmes, or their equivalent, were approved is also provided in annex I, with an indication of where CSNs already exist.

Notes

1/ Report of the International Conference on Population and Development, Cairo, 5-13 September 1994 (United Nations publication, Sales No. E.95.XIII.18), chap. I, resolution 1, annex.

2/ See Official Records of the Economic and Social Council, 1996, Supplement No. 13 (E/1996/33), annex I, decision 96/44.

3/ Ibid., Supplement No. 12 (E/1996/32/Rev.1), annex, decision 1996/34.

Annex I

COUNTRY PROGRAMMES APPROVED BY EXECUTIVE BOARDS OF UNITED NATIONS FUNDS AND PROGRAMMES DURING THE PERIOD UNDER REVIEW (SEPTEMBER 1996-MAY 1997)

	UNDP	UNFPA	UNICEF	WFP a/
Afghanistan (regional)				X
Albania		X		
Angola		X	X	X
Argentina			X	
Bangladesh		X		X
Belize			X	
Bhutan	X		X	X
Bolivia b/		X		X
Burkina Faso		X		
Cambodia		X		X
Caribbean countries		X		
Central African Republic		X	X	
Chile			X	
China				X
Colombia	X			
Comoros b/		X	X	
Congo			X	
Costa Rica b/			X	
Côte d'Ivoire		X	X	
Croatia	X			
Cuba		X	X	
Djibouti		X		
Dominican Republic		X	X	
Ecuador		X		

Annex I (continued)

	UNDP	UNFPA	UNICEF	WFP a/
El Salvador		X	X	X
Eritrea	X	X		
Ethiopia	X	X		X
Gabon			X	
Gambia		X	X	
Ghana b/				X
Guatemala b/			X	X
Guinea b/		X	X	
Haiti	X	X		
Honduras		X		X
India	X	X		X
Iran (Islamic Republic of)				X
Iraq			X	
Jamaica b/			X	
Jordan				X
Kenya b/		X		X
Lao People's Democratic Republic b/	X	X	X	
Latvia	X			
Lebanon		X	X	
Lesotho			X	
Liberia			X	X
Madagascar		X		
Malawi		X	X	
Malaysia			X	
Mali				X
Mauritania b/	X			X
Mexico b/		X		
Moldova (Republic of)			X	

Annex I (continued)

	UNDP	UNFPA	UNICEF	WFP a/
Mongolia	X	X	X	
Morocco b/		X	X	X
Namibia	X	X	X	
Nepal		X	X	
Nicaragua		X	X	X
Nigeria b/		X		
Oman			X	
Pacific island countries		X	X	
Pakistan b/				X
Palestinian people		X		
Panama	X		X	
Papua New Guinea b/	X			
Peru		X		
Poland	X			
Romania	X			
Sao Tome and Principe			X	
Senegal b/		X	X	X
Sierra Leone				X
Somalia			X	
South Africa			X	
Sri Lanka		X	X	
Sudan b/		X	X	X
Syrian Arab Republic				X
Tajikistan				X
Tanzania (United Republic of)		X	X	
Togo		X	X	
Tunisia		X	X	
Turkey			X	

Annex I (continued)

	UNDP	UNFPA	UNICEF	WFP a/
Uganda	X	X		
Uruguay			X	
Uzbekistan	X			
Viet Nam b/		X		
Yemen				X
Zambia b/		X	X	X
Zimbabwe		X		

a/ Including country strategy outlines, development projects and protracted refugee and displaced person projects.

b/ CSN adopted by the Government.

Annex II

SOME OF THE PRINCIPAL ITEMS IN THE AGENDA OF THE EXECUTIVE BOARDS OF THE UNITED NATIONS FUNDS AND PROGRAMMES SINCE THE SUBSTANTIVE SESSION OF 1996 OF THE ECONOMIC AND SOCIAL COUNCIL

Main agenda item	UNDP/UNFPA Executive Board session								UNICEF Executive Board session			WFP Executive Board session		
	Third of 1996		First of 1997		Second of 1997		Annual		Third of 1996	First of 1997	Second of 1997	Third of 1997	First of 1997	Second of 1997
	DP a/	PA b/	DP a/	PA b/	DP a/	PA b/	DP a/	PA b/						
Policy matters including follow-up to Economic and Social Council resolution 1995/56 on the strengthening of the coordination of emergency humanitarian assistance; implementation of policies and strategies on child survival, protection and development, United Nations system-wide Special Initiative on Africa	X		X		X		X			X		X	X	X
Financial and budgetary matters	X	X	X	X	X		X	X	X	X		X	X	
Governance including management excellence and other administrative matters	X		X		X	X	X		X	X	X	X		X
Evaluation							X	X			X	X	X	X
Internal oversight and accountability			X		X		X	X		X				
Country strategy outlines												X		X
Programming process							X	X						

Main agenda item	UNDP/UNFPA Executive Board session								UNICEF Executive Board session			WFP Executive Board session		
	Third of 1996		First of 1997		Second of 1997		Annual		Third of 1996	First of 1997	Second of 1997	Third of 1997	First of 1997	Second of 1997
	DP a/	PA b/	DP a/	PA b/	DP a/	PA b/	DP a/	PA b/						
Country programmes including UNDP country coordination framework and UNICEF programme cooperation c/	X	X	X	X	X	X	X			X		X	X	
WFP development projects												X	X	X
WFP protracted refugee and displaced projects												X	X	X
Inter-agency coordination		X		X						X		X		X
Harmonization of presentation of budgets and accounts	X	X	X	X					X	X				

a/ UNDP segment b/ UNFPA segment c/ See annex I